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ABSTRACT

In 1982-83, a study conducted at Mott Community College (MCC) identified 322 students, or 6% of the student body, as "grossly skill deficient," (i.e., achieving at the junior high school level or below in all basic skill areas). In November 1985, the transcripts of those 322 students were assembled and analyzed to determine enrollment patterns and achievement levels. Study findings included the following: (1) of the skill-deficient students, 194 were males and 123 were females; (2) all 322 registered at MCC during the 2-year period; however, 7.8% dropped all of their classes soon after registration; (3) those who did register were successful in 67% of the classes they completed; (4) the students registered for an average of 2.3 semesters; (5) only four students accumulated 60 credits or more, with the entire group accumulating an average of 10.14 credits each; (6) 31.68% had a grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 or better; (7) only 14.28% followed advice to enroll in three remedial courses, 24.22% enrolled in two remedial classes, and 20.49% enrolled in one remedial class; (8) students who took and passed remedial classes in reading, writing, and mathematics had higher GPA's, persisted longer, completed more courses, and accumulated more credits than students who did not take remedial courses; and (9) in comparison with the MCC student body as a whole, the skills-deficient students were younger, more likely to be female, and more likely to be local residents. (RO)

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WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO THE CLASS OF 1983?

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Flint, Michigan

February 1986

JC 860 226

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What Ever Happened to the Class of 1983?

Characteristics

During the 1982-83 academic year, two of us at Mott Community College (Flint, Michigan) were working on a project for which we needed to identify the grossly skill-deficient students entering the college between January 14 and September 1, 1983.

Students at the college are given three placement tests: reading, writing, and math. The reading test is Form B of the Cooperative English Tests: Reading Comprehension. For writing placement, students write a short theme. They take either an arithmetic or a math test, a choice based on their mathematics background. Faculty in the appropriate disciplines check the placement tests and recommend whether the student should enroll in remedial or college level courses. The recommendations are not binding. However, each entering freshman is required to meet with an advisor before registering. Both the student and the advisor know the recommendations, since they are entered into the student's permanent record on the computer and the student must register via computer.

In the 1982-3 project, we defined a "grossly skill-deficient" student as one recommended for remedial placement in all three areas -- reading, writing and math. Specifically, she/he read below the ninth grade level, could not write standard English sentences, and had the limited arithmetic skills traditionally taught below ninth grade. In other words, the students fitting our definition of "grossly skill-deficient" were those achieving at junior high school level or below in all basic skill areas. There were 322 and they comprised almost six percent (5.77%) of the total number of students (N: 5576) who took the placement tests those seven months.

Colleges are currently experiencing declining enrollments and are therefore especially eager to retain the students they have. Mott Community College (MCC) is no exception. Almost all research on the subject of retention in higher education emphasizes the finding that students who succeed in college, stay in college. Since MCC is, by law, an open-admissions institution, we attract many students who have not previously been successful in school. One can assume that one of the reasons for their lack of success is their undeveloped basic skills.

Will those students who are advised of their basic skill-deficiencies elect to take those courses designed to help eliminate those deficiencies? If so, will they be successful at MCC? Will they stay in college?

In November of 1985, the transcripts of those 322 "grossly skill-deficient" students who took their placement tests in 1983 were assembled. All semesters from Fall of 1983 through Summer of 1985 are included in this report. Had those students followed a typical curriculum for two semesters each, for two years, they would have collected 60 credit hours by May, 1985. With the proper combination of courses and a 2.0 grade point average, they would have graduated then. This study will focus on the characteristics of that group of students and on what happened to them.

Demographically, the students were more often male (M: 194, F: 123) and more often from the city of Flint, (Flint: 183, Other: 139). They ranged in age from 17-53; the age modes were 18 and 19, with an average age of 24 years.

All of the 322 were registered at some time within the past two years. However, 25 (7.8%) of them dropped all of their classes soon after they registered; they have no accumulated credits. Those who did register were successful in 67% of the classes they completed. "Success" is here defined as grades "A" through "D" and also "S" (satisfactory). Withdrawal (W), Incomplete (I), Unsatisfactory (U), and "E" were all defined as "Unsuccessful." The 322 registered an average of 2.3 semesters over the two-year period. Twenty four percent of them (77) were continuing to take classes at MCC in 1985. Four of them (1.24%) have accumulated 60 credits or more. However, the entire group has accumulated only 10.14 credits each, or 2.53 credits per semester, while attempting 4.54 credits each semester.

The 322 accumulated 3264 credits and dropped 666 credits or an average of 2.07 credits each. They failed 496 credits or 1.54 each. In all, they registered for 4426 credits or enough to keep 10 (9.84) instructors teaching fifteen credit hours for a semester, or two and a half instructors employed full-time for two years. Another way to look at it is that their tuition fees alone were almost enough to pay a $50,000 a year administrator for three years ($141,632).

It is obvious when looking at transcripts filled with straight "E's" that some students just gave up at some point in the semester, walked away, and failed all of their classes. There were 60 who did that, and if one subtracts their zero grade point averages from the total, it raises the average grade point average from 1.29 to 1.68.

About a third (31.68%) of the total group has a grade point average of 2.0 or better. However, 24 of those 102 students took only one course, such as photography, physical education or auto repair. Most of those students got an "A" or a "B" in their chosen course. If one eliminates those students with only one course on their transcript, there are 78 (24.22%) of the total group of 322 with a 2.0, or better, grade point average. Of those 78 who are achieving well, 65.38% (51) of them have taken remedial classes. The remaining 35% tended to take classes which do not emphasize reading, writing and math, such as auto technology, photography, drawing, and physical education.

All of the 322 students in this group were advised to take the three remedial courses. Only 46 (14.28%) followed that advice. Seventy eight students (24.22%) registered for two remedial classes, and 66 (20.49%) took one. In other words 190 students (59.01%) took at least one remedial course. As the research noted later will show, taking only one remedial class is generally ineffective. So only 38.51% (124) students took the two or three courses that might have made them successful. Perhaps those students are self-selected achievers. In other words, students who accept recommendations meant to help them may also be students who accept and finish assignments and courses.

Remedial Courses

Do remedial classes help skill-deficient students? It seems so. The grade point average (GPA) of the entire group was 1.3, while the GPA of students who took and passed remedial reading, writing, and math was 1.71. (Figure 1)* The average number of semesters the whole group registered was 2.3, while the average number of semesters for the students who took and passed all three remedial courses was 3.87. (Figure 2) The total group successfully completed an average of 3.25 courses while the remedial group successfully completed an average 8.67 courses. (Figure 3) As for credits, the total group accumulated an average 10.14 while the remedial group gathered 27.6. (Figure 4)

In addition, it seems that the more remedial courses one takes and passes, the more successful the student is at MCC. (Table 2)

*Graphics by Lynn Thigpen

Figure 1

Average Grade Point Averages of Skill-Deficient Students

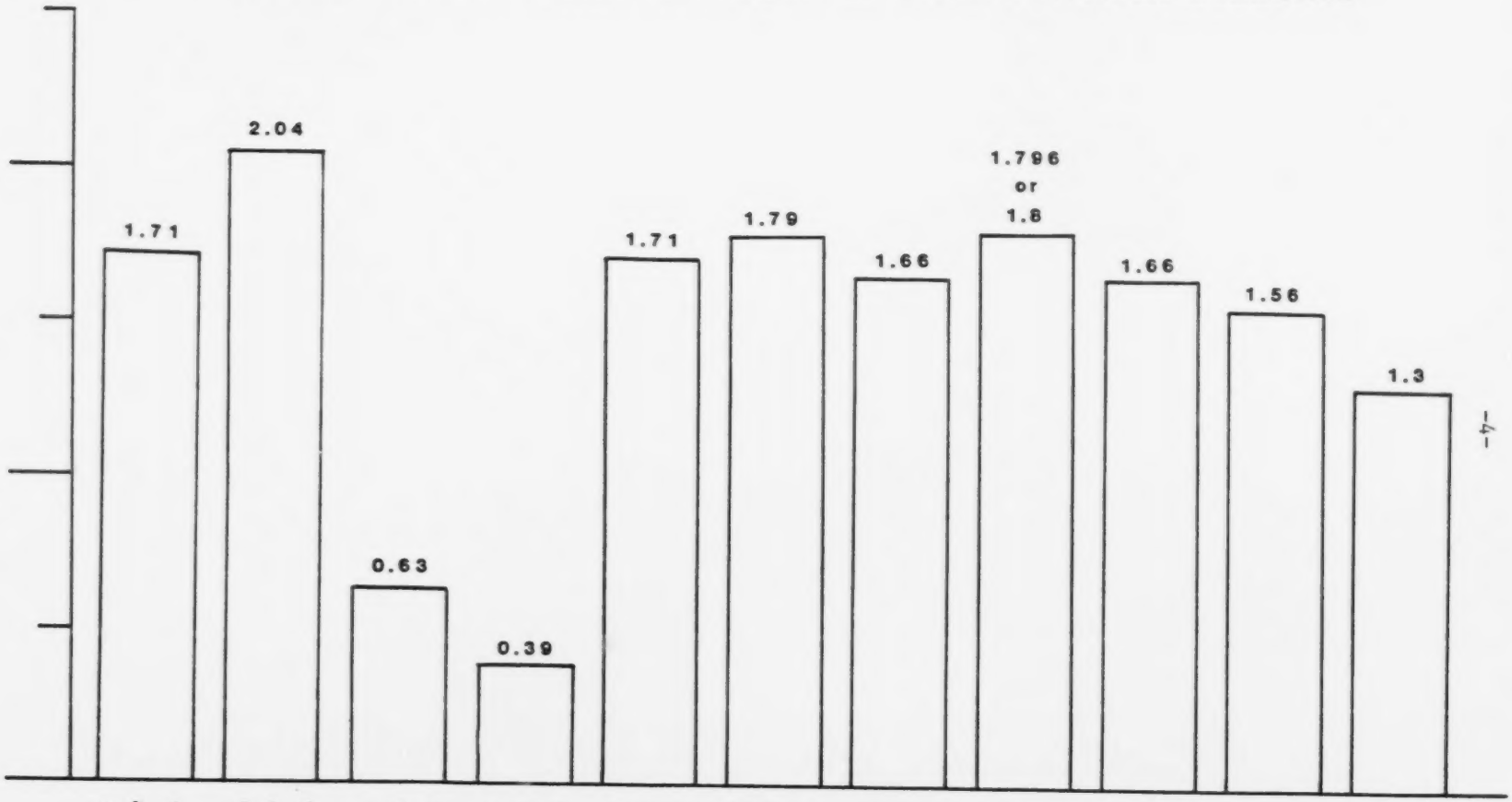

1.71
2.04
0.63
0.39
1.71
1.79
1.66
1.796 or 1.8
1.66
1.56
1.3
Took & passed all 3 remedial courses N:15
Took all 3 remedial classes & passed 2 (see text) N:13
Took all 3 remedial classes & passed 1 N:7
Took all 3 remedial classes & passed none N:11
Took 2 remedial courses & passed both N:33
Took one remedial course & passed it N:39
Took no remedial courses N:125
Took remedial reading & passed it N:56
Took remedial writing & passed it N:81
Took remedial math & passed it N:65
Total Group N: 322

Figure 2

Average Number of Semesters Registered

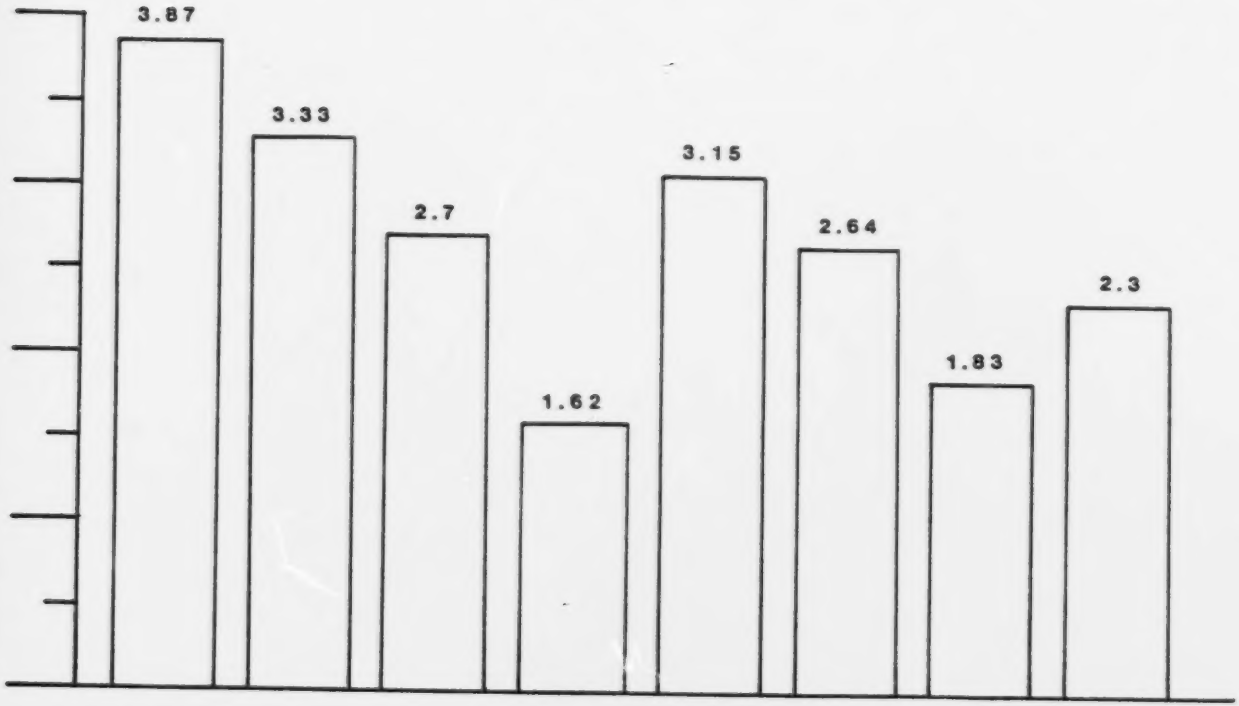

3.87
3.33
2.7
1.62
3.15
2.64
1.83
2.3
Took & passed all 3 remedial courses N:15
Took all 3 remedial courses & passed 2 N:13
Took all 3 remedial courses & passed one N:7
Took all 3 remedial courses & passed none N:11
Took 2 remedial courses & passed both N:33
Took one remedial course & passed it N:39
Took no remedial courses N:125
Total Group N:322

Figure 3

Average Number of Courses Successfully Completed
N:322

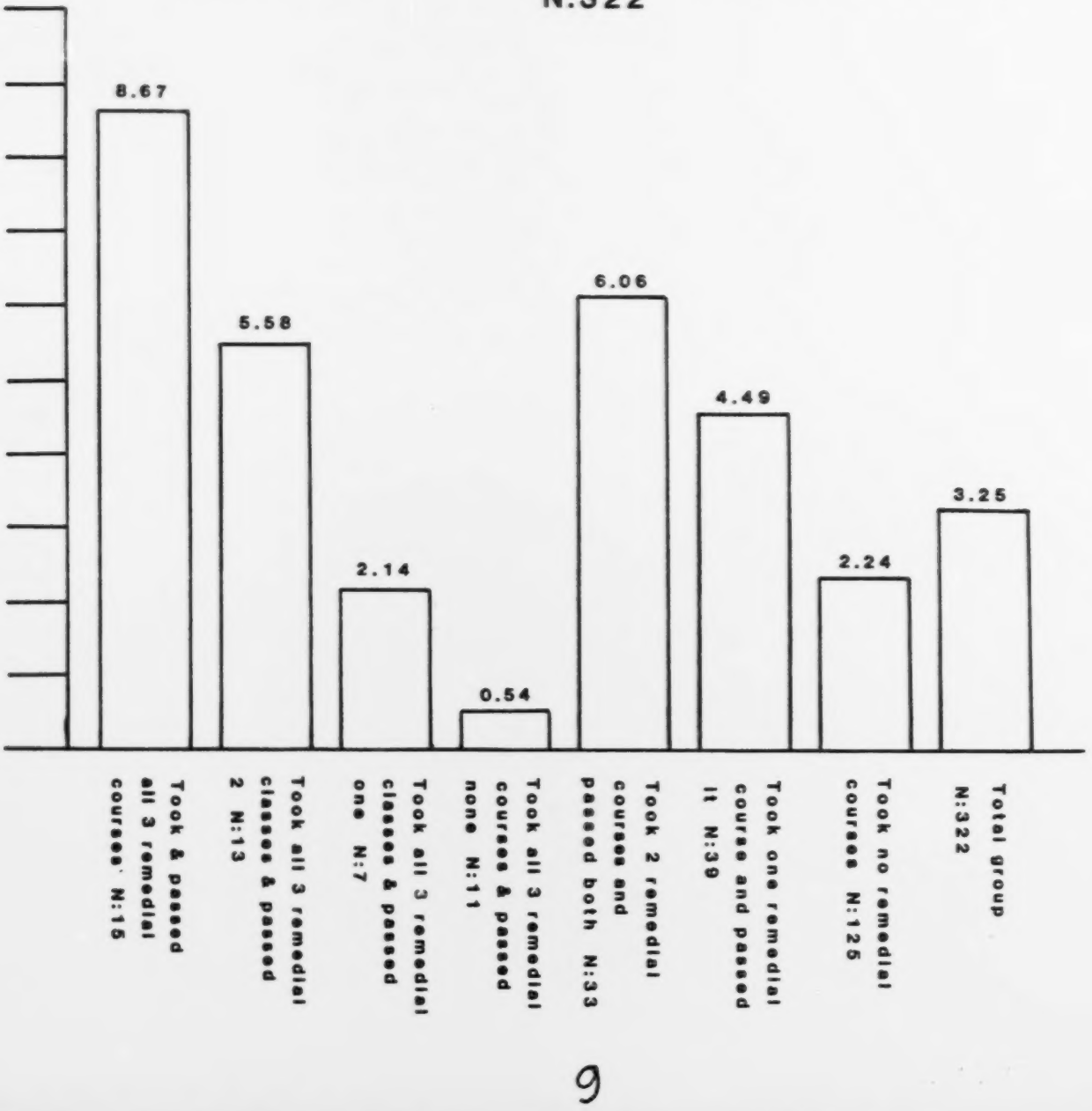

8.67
5.58
2.14
0.54
6.06
4.49
2.24
3.25
Took & passed all 3 remedial courses N:15
Took all 3 remedial classes & passed 2 N:13
Took all 3 remedial classes & passed one N:7
Took all 3 remedial courses & passed none N:11
Took 2 remedial courses and passed both N:33
Took one remedial course and passed it N:39
Took no remedial courses N:125
Total group N:322

Figure 4

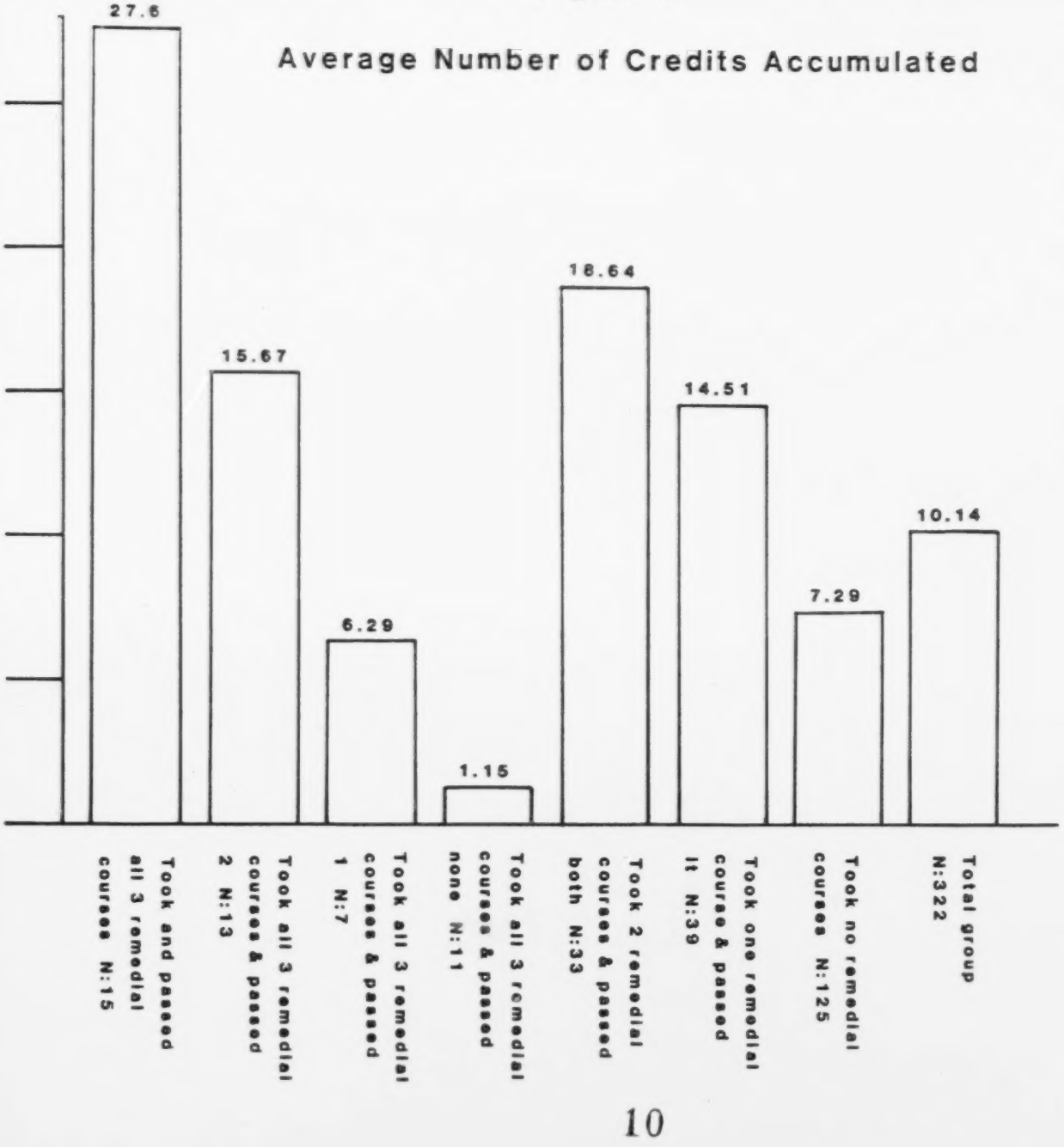

Average Number of Credits Accumulated
27.6
15.67
6.29
1.15
18.64
14.51
7.29
10.14
Took and passed all 3 remedial courses N:15
Took all 3 remedial courses & passed 2 N:13
Took all 3 remedial courses & passed 1 N:7
Took all 3 remedial courses & passed none N:11
Took 2 remedial courses & passed both N:33
Took one remedial course & passed it N:39
Took no remedial courses N:125
Total group N:322

Table 1

Characteristics of Skill-Deficient Students Who Entered Mott Community College between January, 1983, and August, 1983

Total number:	322 (5.77% of all new students enrolled: 5576)
Males:	194 (60.2%)
Females:	123 (38.2%)
Unknown:	5 (1.6%)
From Flint	183 (57%)
From elsewhere:	139 (43%)
Age range:	17 - 53 years
Average age:	24 years
Most common ages:	18 and 19 years
Courses successfully completed:	
Total:	1047 (66.66% of those completed)
Average:	3.25 courses per student
Courses unsuccessfully completed:	
Total:	698 (44.44% of those completed)
Average:	2.16 courses per student
Semesters registered:	Average of 2.3
Number of the group still registered at MCC 1985:	77 (23.9%)
Credits accumulated:	3264. Average of 10.14
Credits dropped:	666 Average of 2.07
Credits failed:	496. Average of 1.54
Grade point average (GPA):	1.296 or 1.3
Number attaining a GPA of 2.0 or better:	102 (31.68%)
Number with a zero (0) GPA:	60 (18.63%)
Number with 60 credits or more:	4 (1.24%)

Table 2

Effectiveness of Remedial Courses
N: 322

I. Took one or more remedial courses: ---------- 182 (56.52%)

II. Took all 3 remedial courses: ---------- 46 (14.2%)
Passed all 3 courses: ---------- 15 (32.6% of the 46)
Passed 2 of the courses: ---------- 13 (28.3% of the 46)
Passed one of the courses: ---------- 7 (15.2% of the 46)
Passed none of the courses: ---------- 11 (23.9%)
-- (Some of these students passed only after taking the courses two or three times)

III. Of those who took and passed all 3 remedial courses: N: 15
Courses successfully completed: ---------- Average of 26
Courses unsuccessfully completed: ---------- Average of 3
Semesters registered: ---------- Average of 3.87
Credits accumulated: ---------- Average of 27.6
Credits dropped: ---------- Average of 3.8
Average GPA ---------- 1.71

IV. Of those who took all three remedial classes and passed two: N: 13
Courses successfully completed: ---------- Average of 5.58
Courses unsuccessfully completed: ---------- Average of 2.25
Semesters registered: ---------- Average of 3.33
Credits accumulated: ---------- Average of 15.67
Credits dropped: ---------- Average of 3.17
GPA ---------- 2.04
(It should be noted that two students in this group took only one course each and have a GPA of 4.0 and 3.0. If those students are eliminated from the group, the average GPA is 1.68)

V. Of those students who took all three remedial courses and passed one. N: 7
Courses successfully completed: ---------- Average of 2.14
Courses unsuccessfully completed: ---------- Average of 5.33
Semesters registered: ---------- Average of 2.7
Credits accumulated: ---------- Average of 6.29
Credits dropped: ---------- Average of 4.71
GPA: ---------- 0.63

VI. Of those students who took all three remedial courses and passed none: N: 11
Courses successfully completed: ---------- Average of 0.54
Courses unsuccessfully completed: ---------- Average of 5.15
Semesters registered: ---------- Average of 1.62
Credits accumulated: ---------- Average of 1.15
GPA: ---------- 1.08
(It should be noted that two students in this group took one physical education course each and each received a 4.0. If those students are eliminated from the group, the average GPA is 0.39)

Table 2 (Continued)

VII. Of those students who took two remedial courses. N: 78 (24.22% of total group)

Of those 78, 33 passed both of those course (42.31%)
- Courses successfully completed: ------- Average of 6.06
- Courses unsuccessfully completed: ----- Average of 1.51
- Semesters registered: ---------- Average of 3.15
- Credits accumulated: ---------- Average of 18.64
- GPA: ---------- 1.71

VIII. Of those students who took one remedial course. N: 58

Of those 58, 39 passed the course --------- (67%)
- Courses successfully completed: ------- Average of 4.49
- Courses unsuccessfully completed: ----- Average of 1.69
- Semesters registered: ---------- Average of 2.64
- Credits accumulated: ---------- 14.51
- GPA: ---------- 1.79

IX. Of those students who took remedial reading (English 020) N: 138 (42.86%)
- Passed the course: ---------- 56 (40.58%)
- Average GPA of those who passed the course: ---------- 1.796 or 1.8
- Have a GPA of 2.0 or better: ---------- 23 (41%)

X. Of those students who took remedial writing (English 024) N: 133 (41.3%)
- Passed the course: ---------- 81 (60.9%)
- Average GPA of those who passed the course: ---------- 1.66

XI. Of those students who took remedial math (Math 021) N: 105 (32.6%)
- Passed the course: ---------- 65 (61.9%)
- Average GPA of those who passed the course: ---------- 1.56

XII. Of those students who took no remedial courses N: 132 (40.99%)
- Courses successfully completed: ------- Average of 2.24
- Courses unsuccessfully completed: ----- Average of 1.05
- Semesters registered: ---------- Average of 1.83
- Credits accumulated: ---------- Average of 7.29
- GPA: ---------- 1.66

(It should be noted that 17 students in this group took one course. If those students are eliminated from the group, the average GPA is 1.42)

Summary

To restate briefly, the students entering MCC during the first six months of 1983, with grossly deficient skills, comprise about six percent of the enrollees. They tend to live close to the college and most of them are twenty-four years old or younger. They passed about 67% of the classes they completed, but only about one percent of them collected enough credits to graduate in the customary two years. The reason for that is that they completed an average of only one course (2.53) each semester and they remained only about a year (2.3 semesters). The majority of this group did not obtain a passing average (GPA 1.29); that may be the reason so many left. On the other hand, about a fourth (24.22%) did attain a 2.0 average.

MCC offers remedial reading, writing, and math classes designed to help such students, and it seems they do help. Those students who registered and succeeded in those three courses had higher grade point averages (1.71), stayed longer (3.87 semesters), successfully completed more courses (8.67 v 3.25), and accumulated more credits (27.6 v 10.14).

The Total Group

According to MCC's Computer Center, 5576 students were admitted to the college between January 14 and September 1, 1983. It seems relevant to compare the 322 "grossly skill-deficient" subgroup, the focus of this study, to the entire group of 5576.

Demographically, the entire group was more often female (F: 3,231; M: 2,345) and more often from outside the city (Flint: 2,533; Other: 3,043). They ranged in age from 17-78 with a mode of 18 and an average age of 26.2 years.

They registered an average of 2.6 semesters over the two-year period. About thirty-seven percent (36.71%), 2,047 students, were continuing to take classes at MCC in 1985. Almost thirteen percent (12.8%) have accumulated 60 credits or more. The entire group (5576) accumulated 88,370 credits, an average of 15.85, or 3.95 credits per semester. They dropped 8,849 credits or 1.59 each.

Sixty-three percent (62.85%) of the group has a 2.0 grade point average (GPA) or better, while 17% have a zero (0.0) GPA. That may mean they have taken no classes, have taken no non-remedial classes, or have an "E" average.

When the characteristics of the total group are compared to the grossly skill-deficient group (Table 3), one notes that the latter group includes disproportionate numbers of males and students from the city of Flint. Those students also tend to be slightly younger.

None of the other data seem surprising. The skill-deficient group registers for slightly fewer semesters; fewer of them were here in 1985. They have accumulated fewer credits and dropped more. They have a much lower average grade point average, and a significantly smaller number have accumulated enough credits to graduate.

It is important to note, however, that even the students who are not grossly skill-deficient have attended an average of only 2.6 semesters within the two-year period and they accumulate only about half the number of credits (15.8) traditionally expected (30) of students in two semesters. In other words, our students are taking about twice as long to complete their class-work as is considered normal. This is exactly what I found in another study done in 1979. I found that students graduating from MCC had taken an average of four years to complete a two-year program.

Table 3

	Total Group Entering Students, Fall, 1983 N: 5576	Grossly Skill-Deficient Students N: 322
Males:	42.06%	60.2%
Females:	57.94%	38.1%
From Flint:	45.42%	57%
From elsewhere:	54.46%	43%
Age range:	17-78 years	17-53 years
Average age:	26.2 years	24 years
Most common age(s):	18 years	18 and 19 years
Average semesters registered:	2.6	2.3
Percent of the group still registered at MCC in 1985:	36.71%	23.9%
Average number of credits accumulated:	15.8	10.14
Average number of credits dropped:	1.59	2.07
Average grade point average:	2.1	1.3
Percentage attaining a GPA of 2.0 or better:	62.85%	31.68%
Percentage with a zero (0) GPA:	17%	18.63%
Percentage with 60 credits or more:	12.8%	1.24%

Summary

While there are fewer male than female enrollees entering MCC, there are far more males in the grossly skill-deficient group (GSDG). The students in that group are more likely to be from Flint and they are slightly younger, on average, than the total group.

There is only a slight difference in the average number of semesters each group registered, but there is substantial difference in the percent of students still continuing to register in 1985, in the number of credits accumulated and in their average grade point averages. As one would expect, in all of those areas the total group did far better than the skill-deficient group.

Figure 5

Demographic Comparisons Between the Total Group and the Grossly Skill-Deficient Group (GSDG)

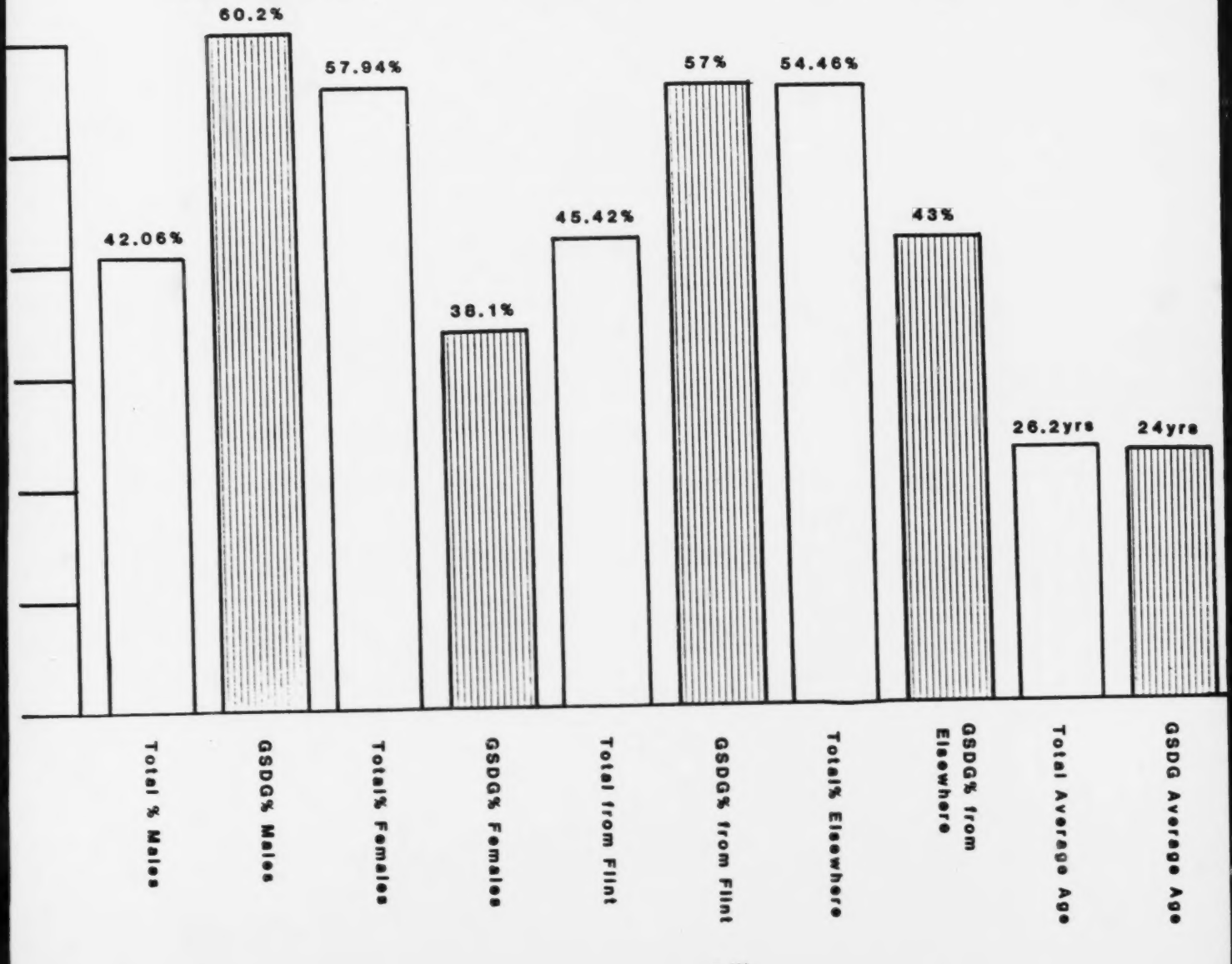
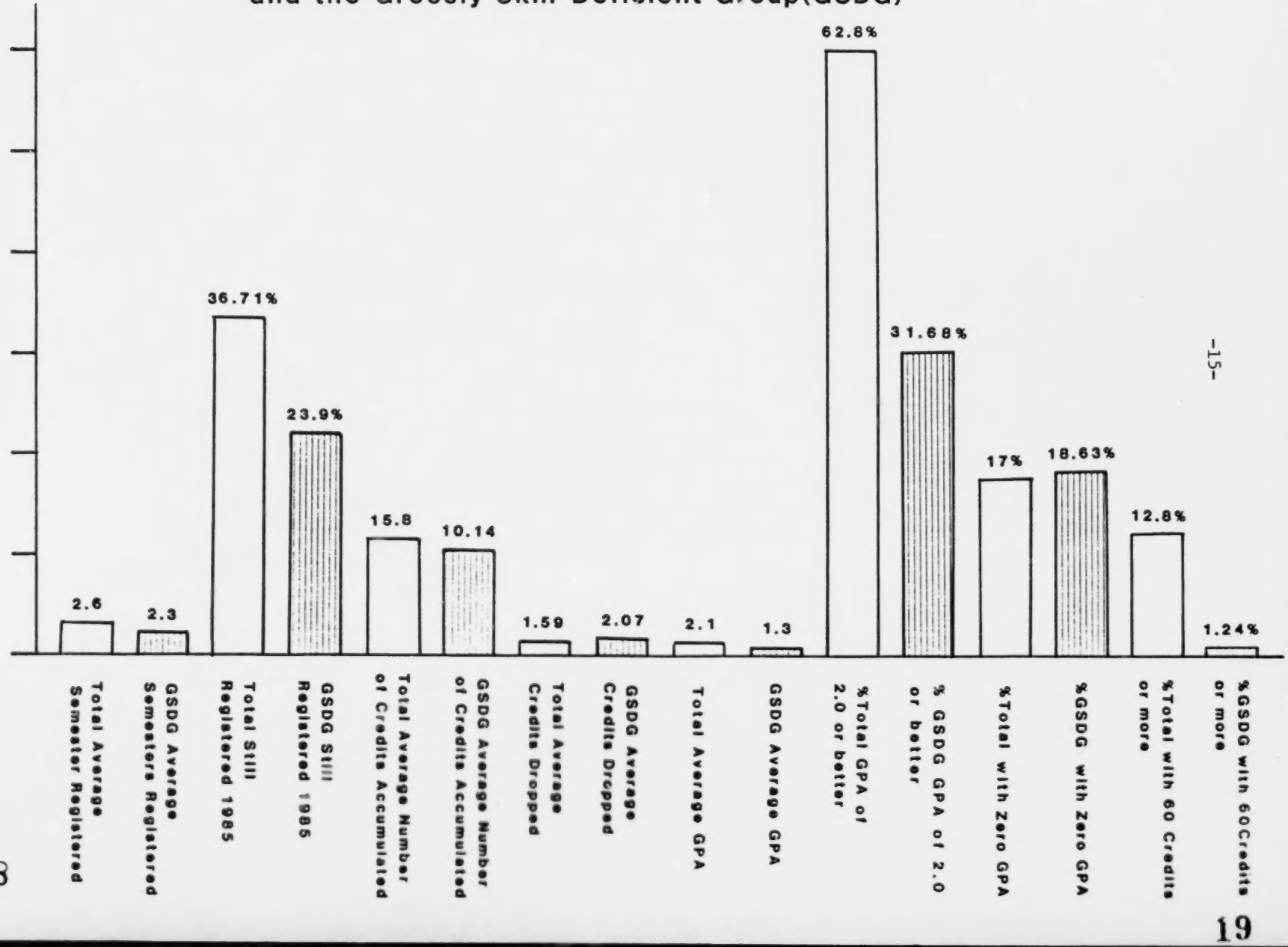


Figure 6

Scholastic Comparisons Between the Total Group and the Grossly Skill-Deficient Group(GSDG)



Conclusions

Mott Community College recruits and attempts to school all manner of enrollees. Of those who have basic skill-levels below high school level, the college is only about 25% effective. Remedial courses help. They tend to raise grade point averages from 1.3 to 1.7. Something more is needed. One thing that becomes very obvious is that we must teach students to withdraw from classes they are failing. They tend to withdraw from few classes -- only about one class each. Those "E's" on their transcripts destroy their grade point averages. In addition, those students need tutoring help from the beginning. Recent research by the tutoring center has proven that averages increase with tutoring time.

Perhaps the new system of registering and carefully following students will augment the gains that remedial classes and tutoring provide.

It may be enough to make more of those students successful. Further research will let us know.

Jacquelyn Reinertson, Ph.D.
February, 1986

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